

FUN ON THE WATER

BY CORNELIA LUETHI

Ponsonby Cruising Club's Femme Fitness Spring Women's Series is yacht racing where women have to do all the work to sail the boat.

CLOCKWISE OPPOSITE PAGE:
CORNELIA LUETHI
GIRLS OUT YACHT RACING
PRIZE GIVING - A FEMME MAGAZINE AND DRINK BOTTLE





One man - usually the boat owner - is on board, but isn't allowed to touch anything. It's a great way of increasing women's skill levels in what is still a very male-dominated sport.

It also encourages newcomers to get into the sport. Women generally start sailing at a later age than guys - and learning in a male environment can be quite intimidating. Jenny Orum, who has been sailing for a year, says "you definitely get to do more stuff in a women's crew. You also learn more because girls tend to be better at explaining things."

Dianne Telford, the club's Office Manager, has been racing in the women's series for 12 years. "When it started, it was mostly for very proficient women sailors" she recalls. "It's been great to see it evolve, and it now caters for everyone. There are some very competitive girls taking part, but it's also great for those who want to learn to sail."

Competitive sailorettes use this series as practice for other regattas. Take Sally Garrett, who has done so much sailing in her 30 years it's amazing that she also has time to work full time, study for a Masters degree, and coach a team for the Women's Keelboat Nationals in April 2007. She's preparing for the 2009 Flying Fifteen World Championships "just as something to do" and is aiming to race in next year's Coastal Classic (NZ's biggest yacht race) with an all-girl crew.

Ponsoby Cruising Club was one of the first clubs in NZ to organise women's racing: that was over 20 years ago. "We're trendsetters!" laughs Colin Sykes, the club Commodore. The racing is dependent on boatowners lending the girls their boat - and also usually their time and knowledge. The Commodore is a big supporter of the series and believes everyone involved gains from the experience. "The boatowners enjoy passing on their knowledge to those that want to learn" he says.

Boatowners also use the series to recruit new crew. "I

can't go sailing without crew, and the girls that take part in the women's series sail with me in other races too, so it's a win-win situation" says Tony Smith, who in his ten years of women's racing has introduced well over 50 girls to the sport.

Boatowner Clive Carter has also been involved since the early days. Isn't he worried about lending the girls his pride and joy? "No, it's only a material thing. Besides, the girls are very careful with the boat - they're more cautious than men."

Yachting is also an incredibly sociable sport. Whilst most discussions during the race are focused on tactics, there's plenty of opportunity to catch up on gossip over a rum and coke on the boat after the race, and then again at the clubhouse over a pizza. "It's a wonderful stress release on a Tuesday evening" says new crew Yvonne Lane.

So what kind of girls go yacht racing? There's no stereotype to be found here: they do all kinds of jobs, and are of all ages nationalities. Outside of sailing, many of these women can be found in gyms, touch teams, jogging, cycling, sea swims, and taking part in triathlons. Their common bond is the sheer love of being out on the water. *f*

WANT TO TAKE PART TOO? SAILING CLUBS THROUGHOUT NZ RUN WOMEN'S SERIES, OR IF YOU'RE IN AUCKLAND CHECK OUT THE CREW FINDER ON WWW.PCC.ORG.NZ TO FIND A BOAT TO SAIL ON.

